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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to explore the reading habits, interests, and attitudes of older readers. One hundred and twenty readers aged 60 to 64 years participated in the Adult Inventory of Reading Interests and Attitudes (AIRIA) and were classified as minimal, moderate, and avid book readers. Fifty-five of these subjects were then interviewed. Among the results were the following: (1) three-fourths reported that worry changed the amount of time they spent reading; (2) avid and moderate readers mentioned that if they were able to read encouraging books during periods of depression, such reading material could help them through those periods; (3) female minimal and moderate readers indicated they had been taught that work was far more important than reading and spoke with nostalgia of the childhood years when there was not so much work and they were able to read more; (4) minimal readers epxressed a desire to be drawn back into reading, wishing that they had learned to enjoy reading more during the earlier years; (5) many women recognized a pattern of reading preferences parallel to their social role as females; and (6) those reading very little expressed a deep concern that schools not only teach children how to read but also teach them to love reading. (HTH)

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WHAT BRINGS THE READER TO READING?

A paper presented at the Tenth Plains Regional Conference of the International Reading Association, on September 30, 1982

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What Brings the Reader to Reading?

A human being does not suddenly find himself or herself to be elderly. To be old is a matter of becoming. While we are in the process of becoming elderly a great many events in our lives are working together, creating the elderly person which we shall become. One of these events is the reading which we do.

A mature adult avid reader can be defined as one who enjoys reading and considers that reading is an important part of a total life. He or she reads widely, with a broad range of interests. What has caused these individuals to develop their reading potential to such an extent? What is it that makes one very old person say longingly, "...but there is still so much that I haven't read" while another, capable of reading, has never understood that a life of reading enjoyment may help to bring one comfortably through? How have the elderly become what they are? What synergetic factors have made some of them become avid readers while others chose not to read?

Only recently has research into reading behavior begun to examine larger populations and deal with questions concerning reasons for reading and changes in reading habits. Since the Gray and Rogers study (1956) many researchers (De Santi, 1976; Harvey and Dutton, 1979; & Kingston, 1979) have suggested that much more work is needed in this area. Kanner (1972) has shown that reading activities can contribute to helping older persons adjust to changes in their retirement years. But is it possible to know what kinds of reading activities should be promoted without surveying the habits and attitudes of adult readers before they are at the age of retirement? If reading provides a coping mechanism pertinent to the problems of aging, then

it is important that we understand just which variables are present in the live of those persons who enjoy an active life of reading.

Methodology

Recently 60 male and 60 female readers aged 60 through 64 were selected for personal interviews using the Adult Inventory of Reading Interests and Attitudes (AIRIA). Advertisements had been placed in newspapers and on the daily bulletin board segments of radio stations, asking for individuals who were willing to respond to a project designed for educational research, tc call a specified telephone number. As the telephone calls were received the individuals were asked their names, addresses, and telephone numbers. They were also asked to state the number of books they had read during the last six months. The responses were then categorized according to the sex of the respondents and the number of books read.

One of the difficulties in examining research concerning who the book readers are has been the fact that findings are often incompatible because of different parameters which have been used in the definition. Is an adult considered to be a book reader if he or she reads one book a year? Gallup (1976) defined an avid reader as one who reads six or more books a year. Such a reader was likely to be female, young, either a student or college educated person with a professional or business occupation. The American Library Association (Gallup, 1978) defined an avid reader as one who reads 21 or more books a year. Yankelovich, Skelly, and White (1978) defined a moderate/heavy book reader as one who had read 10 or more books in the past six months. Ennis (1965) felt that the selection

of the six-month period reflected a compromise between the year-long interval and the narrower interval of a month. Ennis' reason for selecting the six-month period was that the gain in accuracy of memory was achieved with the shorter period.

In the present study, males and females who had read one or no books were classified as minimal readers. Those who had read from two to nine books were classified as moderate readers and those who had read ten or more books were classified as avid book readers. From each of these six categories 20 names were reandomly selected. The selected individuals were then contacted and an appointment for a personal interview was arranged. Of the 120 individuals interviewed, 55 had grade school experiences only and 34 had college experiences ranging from 1 to 4 years.

During the one-hour interviews the adults were found to be reflective and eager to share their past and present attitudes and reading experiences. The forced choice responses to the inventory items were analyzed with the use of the chi square statistic, the level of significance having been established at .05. Table 1 presents the responses by reading category to the inventory items.

Insert Table I about here.

Discussion

Three-fourths of the individuals interviewed reported that worry changed the amount of time spent in reading and those who made that response indicated they read less when they were worried. From the adults who reported feelings of anxiety or nervousness when reading had not occurred

Table 1

Adults' Responses by Reading Category to Variables Related to Reading

Group	Agree	Disagree	Chi Square	df	p	SS
1. When I am worried about something, I find that it changes the amount of time I spend in reading.						
minimal	31 (77.5%)	9 (22.5%)				
moderate	31 (77.5%)	9 (22.5%)				
avid	28 (70.0%)	12 (30.0%)	0.8000	2	0.6703	N.S.
2. When I am not able to read for a period of time, I feel anxiety or nervousness.						
minimal	11 (27.5%)	29 (72.5%)				
moderate	17 (42.5%)	23 (57.5%)				
avid	22 (55.0%)	18 (45.0%)	6.2400	2	0.0442	Sig.
3. When I am depressed, I find that there is a change in the amount of reading which I do.						
minimal	20 (50.0%)	20 (50.0%)				
moderate	30 (75.0%)	10 (25.0%)				
avid	30 (75.0%)	10 (25.0%)	7.5000	2	0.0235	Sig.
4. When I am contented, I tend to read more.						
minimal	26 (65.0%)	14 (35.0%)				
moderate	24 (60.0%)	16 (40.0%)				
avid	24 (60.0%)	16 (40.0%)	0.28202	2	0.8685	N.S.
5. When I feel either happy or depressed, I tend to read material that reflects my feeling.						
minimal	19 (47.5%)	21 (52.5%)				
moderate	14 (35.0%)	26 (65.0%)				
avid	12 (30.0%)	28 (70.0%)	2.77333	2	0.2499	N.S.
6. The material I read tends to change my mood.						
minimal	31 (77.5%)	9 (22.5%)				
moderate	29 (72.5%)	11 (27.5%)				
avid	28 (70.0%)	12 (30.0%)	0.59659	2	0.7421	N.S.

Group	Agree	Disagree	Chi Square	df	p	SS
7. During certain periods of my life I have read more than I do now.						
minimal	34 (85.0%)	6 (15.0%)				
moderate	33 (82.5%)	7 (17.5%)				
avid	20 (50.0%	20 (50.0%)	15.2978	2	0.0005	Sig.
8. During certain periods of my life I have read less than I do now.						
minimal	22 (55.0%)	18 (45.0%)				
moderate	30 (75.0%)	10 (25.0%)				
avid	34 (85.0%)	6 (15.0%)	9.19288	2	0.0101	Sig.
9. I am able to concentrate on what I have read as well as I always could.						
minimal	25 (62.5%)	15 (37.5%)				
moderate	23 (57.5%)	17 (42.5%)				
avid	32 (80.0%)	8 (20.0%)	5.02500	2	0.0811	N.S.
10. It is as easy (or easier) for me to become interested in reading as it was when I was younger.						
minimal	23 (57.5%)	17 (42.5%)				
moderate	31 (77.5%)	9 (22.5%)				
avid	38 (95.0%)	2 (5.0%)	15.74534	2	0.0004	Sig.
11. My preferences for what I choose to read have changed over the years.						
minimal	23 (57.5%)	17 (42.5%)				
moderate	26 (65.0%)	14 (35.0%)				
avid	33 (82.5%)	7 (17.5%)	6.08472	2	0.0477	Sig.
12. I recall a particular book that I have read which caused me to change my mind or attitude regarding something.						
minimal	12 (30.0%)	28 (70.0%)				
moderate	24 (60.0%)	16 (40.0%)				
avid	30 (75.0%)	10 (25.0%)	16.96968	2	0.0002	Sig.

Group	Agree	Disagree	Chi Square	df	p	SS
13. I wish that I had learned to enjoy reading more in earlier years.						
minimal	29 (72.5%)	11 (27.5%)				
moderate	19 (47.5%)	21 (52.5%)				
avid	7 (17.5%)	33 (82.5%)	24.43636	2	0.0000	Sig.
14. I enjoy being with people who read a great deal.						
minimal	30 (75.0%)	10 (25.0%)				
moderate	32 (80.0%)	8 (20.0%)				
avid	36 (90.0%)	4 (10.0%)	3.11688	2	0.2105	N.S.
15. I frequently attend at least one social, political, special interest, or church related activity.						
minimal	37 (92.5%)	3 (7.5%)				
moderate	38 (95.0%)	2 (5.0%)				
avid	36 (90.0%)	4 (10.0%)	0.72072	2	0.6974	N.S.
16. I enjoy participating in or watching sports activities.						
minimal	25 (62.5%)	15 (37.5%)				
moderate	29 (72.5%)	11 (27.5%)				
avid	23 (57.5%)	17 (42.5%)	2.02960	2	0.3625	N.S.
17. I discuss what I read with others.						
minimal	34 (85.0%)	6 (15.0%)				
moderate	35 (87.5%)	5 (12.5%)				
avid	34 (85.0%)	6 (15.0%)	0.13706	2	0.9338	N.S.
18. I sometimes exchange books with another person.						
minimal	15 (37.5%)	25 (62.5%)				
moderate	33 (82.5%)	7 (17.5%)				
avid	30 (75.0%)	10 (25.0%)	20.43954	2	0.0000	Sig.
19. On occasion I read a book or article because someone has recommended it.						
minimal	37 (92.5%)	3 (7.5%)				
moderate	40 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)				
avid	40 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6.15384	2	0.0461	Sig.

20. I feel that I have a reasonably active social life for someone my age.

minimal	33 (82.5%)	7 (17.5%)			
moderate	32 (80.0%)	8 (20.0%)			
avid	34 (85.0%)	6 (15.0%)	0.34632	2	0.8410 N.S.

21. I would like to belong to a group which meets regularly to share books and articles which the members have enjoyed.

minimal	12 (30.0%)	28 (70.0%)			
moderate	20 (50.0%)	20 (50.0%)			
avid	21 (52.5%)	19 (47.5%)	4.93382	2	0.0848 N.S.

22. I would read more if my eyes wouldn't bother me.

minimal	8 (20.0%)	32 (80.0%)			
moderate	13 (32.5%)	27 (67.5%)			
avid	6 (15.0%)	34 (85.0%)	3.72760	2	0.1551 N.S.

23. Someone in my home read to me a great deal when I was a child.

minimal	5 (12.5%)	35 (87.5%)			
moderate	11 (27.5%)	29 (72.5%)			
avid	18 (45.0%)	22 (55.0%)	10.42407	2	0.0055 Sig.

24. I saw at least one person in my home read a great deal.

minimal	29 (72.5%)	11 (27.5%)			
moderate	31 (77.5%)	9 (22.5%)			
avid	34 (85.0%)	6 (15.0%)	1.86579	2	0.3934 N.S.

25. I read a great deal when I was a child.

minimal	14 (35.0%)	26 (65.0%)			
moderate	23 (57.5%)	17 (42.5%)			
avid	30 (75.0%)	10 (25.0%)	13.04421	2	0.0015 Sig.

26. Books were always available in my home.

minimal	25 (62.5%)	15 (37.5%)			
moderate	24 (60.0%)	16 (40.0%)			
avid	27 (67.5%)	13 (32.5%)	0.50239	2	0.7779 N.S.

27. I sometimes see a program on television or hear a program on the radio which leads me to read a book.

minimal	9 (22.5%)	31 (77.5%)			
moderate	20 (50.0%)	20 (50.0%)			
avid	18 (45.0%)	22 (55.0%)	7.20489	2	0.0092 Sig.

28. I watch a great deal of television.

minimal	10 (25.0%)	30 (75.0%)			
moderate	7 (17.5%)	33 (82.5%)			
avid	5 (12.5%)	35 (87.5%)	2.11503	2	0.3473 N.S.

Group	Agree	Disagree	Chi Square	df	p	SS
29. Learning to read was fairly easy for me.						
minimal	30 (75.0%)	10 (25.0%)				
moderate	34 (85.0%)	6 (15.0%)				
avid	37 (92.5%)	3 (7.5%)	4.62741	2	0.0989	N.S.
30. The type of work which I do requires that I read.						
minimal	17 (42.5%)	23 (57.5%)				
moderate	17 (42.5%)	23 (57.5%)				
avid	30 (75.0%)	10 (25.0%)	11.31696	2	0.0035	Sig.
31. I would read more if I had more free time.						
minimal	26 (65.0%)	14 (35.0%)				
moderate	26 (65.0%)	14 (35.0%)				
avid	20 (50.0%)	20 (50.0%)	2.50000	2	0.2865	N.S.
32. My spouse reads about the same number of books that I do.						
minimal	10 (27.8%)	26 (72.2%)				
moderate	7 (19.4%)	29 (80.6%)				
avid	6 (19.4%)	25 (80.6%)	0.94707	2	0.6228	N.S.
33. My children read about the same amount that I did at their age.						
minimal	9 (23.7%)	29 (76.3%)				
moderate	17 (44.7%)	21 (55.3%)				
avid	19 (48.7%)	20 (51.3%)	5.81293	2	0.0547	N.S.

(Stronks, 1981)

for a period of time, expressions like the following were heard:

> Well, when I'm very busy, or a wedding or social event occurs and it takes a long period of time so that a week goes by and I just haven't been able to sit and read, I feel depressed.

Of the individuals who reported a change in reading amount during periods of depression, most were avid and moderate readers who indicated they read less when they were depressed. Those who did not report a change in reading amount during periods of depression indicated that there was a change in the type of books read. Individuals who felt that the material which they read tended to change their mood, explained that reading material did not make them feel depressed when their mood was a happy one, but during times of depression they were careful to avoid certain types of books. Avid and moderate readers mentioned the fact that if they were able to read encouraging books during periods of depression, such reading material could help them through those periods.

Female minimal and moderate readers indicated they had been taught that work was far more important than reading and spoke with nostalgia of the childhood years when there was not so much work and they read more. Periods when males and females read more than they do now included years when their children were small and reading was used as an escape, the years before television became such an important part of life, during the war years while in service, years of economic depression when there was little money for social activities, and during recovery from illness. Periods when less reading was done included times of mental depression, periods when books were not available, or when the children were young

and life was very busy. The comment was often made that the period of life between ages 29 and 50 was such a busy time because of the responsibilities of work and family life that it was difficult to feel relaxed enough to read. These individuals stated that they tended to move away from the habit of reading during those years and it was difficult to regain the habit. The lessening of the skill of concentration on reading material was also mentioned by women minimal and moderate readers as being a result of habits formed during those years. One woman said:

> When my children were small I was very busy and there weren't many books available. I went through a period when I hardly read at all. Then someone gave me a book club gift. It was the most wonderful gift I have ever been given and I still keep my subscription.

Direction and motivation must be provided if these people are to be drawn back into reading after the age of 50.

That the adults in this study wished to be drawn back into reading can be recognized from their statements concerning the desire that they had learned to enjoy reading more during earlier years. More minimal than moderate readers reported this desire and more moderate than avid readers said this was true. While it is impossible to change the childhood experiences individuals had with reading, means can be sought to help them learn to enjoy reading as adults. However, recognition must be made of the fact that not all adults will be motivated to read through the same means. Book-sharing groups may provide motivation for some individuals. This study indicated that for female moderate readers,

suggestions from radio and television programs may provide the necessary stimulus for reading.

A total of 76.7% of the individuals stated that it is as easy to become interested in reading as it was during earlier years, but that response was given by more avid readers than moderate readers and by more moderate readers than minimal readers. It is not clear whether the individuals continued to read because they continued to be easily interested in reading material or whether they continued to be interested because of their habit of reading. Many said that their interests have broadened in recnet years and therefore they enjoy reading more. One woman expressed it this way:

> When I was younger I wasn't able to get out of the house so much. Now I can break away and develop a variety of interests which helps my reading. It encourages me to have more variety in my reading.

A male reader expressed a similar view:

> It is simply easier to read and understand now that I know so much more about life. I am older now and although I used to read fiction my interests are so much more broad and I can now read in a whole range of areas.

Many women recognized a pattern of reading preferences. During adolescent years they often read only love stories. Between ages 20 and 40 their reading preferences centered on topics concerning child-raising, homemaking, and factual reading for helping children with homework.

At the present time they are more interested in reading informational material in the areas of history and autobiography. Male readers moved from fiction during years of adolescence to work-related material between the ages of 20 and 40. At present, they also are more interested in history, as well as instructional and devotional reading materials.

During the personal interviews the respondents were asked how they selected the books which they read. A total of 71 (59.2%) individuals stated that they used suggestions from acquaintances, 31 (25.8%) individuals said that they read what was available, 13 (10.0%) individuals used suggestions from radio and television programs, and 49 (40.8%) individuals selected books by browsing in the library. A total of 67 (53.6%) of the respondents stated they never used library services. Many of them expressed concern over the unavailability of books about subjects which interested them but they also seemed to be unaware of the large number of books which do exist in those areas. People in this age group need more information concerning the types of books which are available and concerning library services which are especially designed for the elderly.

There appeared to be a deep concern on the part of those who are presently reading very little that schools should not only be teaching children how to read but teaching them to love to read. One reader stated:

> I would be much better off now if I had learned to enjoy reading when I was younger. I could always read the words but I had a great deal of trouble understanding. Now that I am older I have the time, and if I had learned to understand what I read I would read more now.

Another reader said:

> I was taught to read with a great deal of emphasis on phonics. Even now I find myself making the sounds in my throat as I read and it interferes with my enjoyment. I wish I had been taught to read with a different method.

The relationship between childhood experiences with reading and number of books read by the adults indicated that more avid readers than moderate readers and more moderate readers than minimal readers reported having been read to a great deal during childhood and having read a great deal during childhood. It is evident that educators need to help parents understand the relationship between early childhood experiences with books and a total life of reading. From those who could look back on a lifetime of reading enjoyment came the plea that others be helped to enjoy reading. One male reader expressed his view this way:

> I am a retired person with a limited area of interest. I must read to expand that interest. But my reading would take on more significance if I would plan it more and I need help with that. I need more of a balanced reading diet. People should prepare for retirement by expanding their interests and maybe reading on photography or gardening. There should be journals for retirement. I want to be able to be better at doing the things I'm interested in and I want to be interested in more things. Reading would help that.

Implications for educators

But what does all of this have to say for teachers in our elementary and secondary schools? According to many studies, high school is the time when less reading for enjoyment occurs than at many other times. And you can not do very much about the interfering factors of peers, involvement with cars and leisure activities, home attitudes toward reading, or past experiences with reading. Your task is an immediate one. It has long-range implications but it is an enormously difficult task.

First of all, students need help in recognizing their own responsibility in becoming readers. When you present any subject area, have with you paperbacks of interesting reading in that area and present these books to the students with enthusiasm.

Then make certain that students rely on their own reading in content areas. We have a tendency to say, "Well, they won't read the textbook and they need the information so I must teach the information to them". So long as you do that, no one will read the textbook. Make certain the choice of material has been written at the reading level of the students and then hold them responsible for getting the information from that. Reading and study strategies have been developed for encouraging students to respond to the text, and if you are not familiar with these strategies, hold inservice sessions dealing with demonstrations of such activities.

Have in class times of sustained silent reading when every student must be reading for enjoyment, information, or edification from some material other than that which was assigned. Students who do only this amount of additional reading will be encouraged to develop a habit for reading.

Make certain that any room used for a study hall has a large selection of paperbacks so that students can immediately select one when assignments have been completed. When such books are kept only in the library there is the complicating factor of excusing the student from study hall to go to the library and because of possible discipline problems you may be reluctant to allow that. Surround the students with paperbacks.

Recognizing that reading preferences change throughout the life span, lead students into topics other than fiction. Helping students find enjoyment in reading biography, autobiography, history and self-improvement books will encourage them to move into such areas in later years when they are no longer interested in fiction.

In a very real sense, it is <u>your</u> enthusiasm for books, your understanding of the importance of reading in a total life, that is going to get your students started. It really doesn't help very much to tell students to read more. But if you are a person they have learned to respect and admire, some of them will respond to your enthusiasm. If you know the books and the students well and then do a good, honest job of presenting those books to the students, you will have made a lasting difference in their lives.

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